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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, November 30, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Christmas Blooms from Bulbs." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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Thanksgiving's over. Now we can take a long breath, and then start making plans for Christmas. But I'm not going to mention Christmas food today -- not after all the food conversation we've already had this week. For a change, I think you'll enjoy some talk about flowers -- Christmas flowers to raise at home for your own enjoyment or for Christmas gifts. I'm thinking now of fragrant white narcissus to bloom on Christmas morning, or bright daffodils or hyacinths on the window sill, even with the snow blowing against the pane outside. Well, W.R.B. says that if you treat your bulbs properly, you can have lovely potted flowers for your own home or to give away.

But he also says that you need to do your Christmas planting early. Perhaps you remember that we spoke about potting bulbs about the first of October. If you don't get your bulbs in early, there's no hope of having flowers at Christmas. You see, bulbs need a long period of storage in a dark, cool, moist place to grow a sound underpinning of roots before the leaves and flowers start. The plant should grow its foundation first, you see, and its upper structure later. So the roots develop in a dark, cool, place -- underground, and then you bring the plant into the warmth and light where the leaf and flower stems will start up. The period of root-growing takes from six to twelve weeks, depending on the variety of bulb.

The flowers that you can grow successfully indoors, or "force" as the experts say, are narcissus, daffodils, hyacinths, tulips and lilies of the valley. Narcissus, especially the paper-white and the common daffodil, are particularly good for indoors. You can grow them in a shallow bowl of pebbles and water -- nothing else. Or you can grow them in a pot of sand, or prepared fiber, or ordinary soil. But tulips and hyacinths need a good soil mixture in a pot.

Now some bulbs take a long time and some a comparatively short time to grow their roots. Paper-white narcissus planted in soil needs only six weeks of dark storage; daffodils take a little longer; and hyacinths and early tulips need twelve weeks at least. The bulbs you potted and put underground early in the fall, you can hope to have in bloom at Christmas if you bring them in about the first of December. If you are growing the paper-white narcissus in a bowl of water -- anchored in pebbles with just enough water to feed its roots, then

it will need four to six weeks in a cool cellar or attic in semi-darkness to develop plenty of roots. Many people have had success growing daffodils in this way, too -- just support the bulb in a shallow bowl with pebbles and give it just a little water around the base. Keep it in a cool, partly dark place until the roots are well-developed. Whenever you see a bulb that has grown top-heavy in water, all leaves and scarcely any roots, you'll know it started in too warm surroundings.

Well, to go back to the bulbs in pots. Once the root systems are well-established, bring the pot into a warmer and lighter place. Better keep the bulbs a few days in a cool, semi-dark place before you set them in the full light of the window-sill. And if you want the leaves and flowers to grow evenly, remember to turn the pots frequently so the light will reach all sides.

W.R.B. says the paper-white narcissus is the very easiest of all bulbs to force in the house. And he says if you plant new bulbs every two weeks, you'll have a succession of blooms coming out steadily from Christmas to Easter.

The next most easy bulb to grow in pots indoors is the Roman hyacinth. You'll keep these under the soil well-watered until the first of December. Then bring them to light and start the leaves up, so you'll have the flowers during the holidays.

How about forcing lily of the valley. Almost everyone loves this fragrant bloom, yet few people realize how easily it will grow and flower in homes during the winter. These flowers, you know, don't have real bulbs; they have a kind of fleshy root that the florists call a "pip." Like bulbs, lily pips need a period in storage before forcing. At this time of year you can buy the pips from seed or bulb firms that have been keeping them in storage.

Pot them as soon as you receive them. You can put four or five little individual plants in an ordinary five-inch pot. Plant them in pure sand or in a mixture of 2 parts loam, 1 part leaf mold and 1 part sand. Leave the tip of each pip a little above the surface of the soil when you plant; then cover the top with a layer of deep sphagnum moss.

Lilies of the valley need warmth and a good deal of moisture to grow. For the first few days, better keep the pots in a semi-dark place. Then, as they grow, bring them into full light. A temperature ranging from 70 to 80 degrees F. is ideal for best growth. Count on blooms 21 days from the day you plant. I can't think of a lovelier home-made Christmas present than a pot of fragrant lilies in full bloom.

W.R.B. tells me that later in the winter you can lift clumps of lily-of-the-valley pips, keep them a few days in a moderately cool place, then pot them and bring them later into the warmth to force them into flower. Yes, you can take up the plants even when the ground is frozen.

That's all about Christmas flowers today. Tomorrow we'll have another letter from our news reporter in Washington.

